

Good News!

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[0 : 00] Okay, we are working through the great letter of Romans. This is the greatest letter that's ever been written. It was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome in the first century, just after 20 years or so, after Jesus resurrected from the dead.

And so far, what we've seen a lot of in the book of Romans is judgment, is God's wrath revealed, is because of the violation of God's justice, God's judgment, his wrath revealed in creation, in the curse, in being given over to sin.

And there's a summary statement about this in verse 24, the start of the new sentence in verse 24, sorry, verse 22, for there is no distinction.

For there is no distinction. And that's a brief little way of Paul summarizing everything that he's been saying the whole book so far. For there is no distinction. And that means whether you're a religious person, whether you've grown up in the church, you've grown up reading the Bible, or whether you're a non-religious person, a secular person in the modern West, no matter what background you've come from, that everybody is aware knows the objective, moral order that God has made. And that everybody also knows, Paul has told us, that we've rebelled against that objective moral order. And that our subjective consciousness, our moral conscience has revealed that fact to us, even if we've never read God's law, that we feel the reality subjectively, that objectively we bear some kind of guilt against some type of moral standard.

[1 : 44] And everybody feels that, and that's what Paul's been saying, that whether you've grown up religious or not religious, your conscience bears witness to this objective guilt, this objective rebellion that every human that's ever been born feels.

But verse 21. But now, but now, it's the transition point. This is the Romans 3, 21 to 26 especially, 21 to 31, it's the climax of the first section of the book of Romans.

It's the but now section. Judgment, but now a new age has dawned, a new age has come, and this is the classic text for coming.

And for people talking about what it means to be depraved on the one hand and what it means to be justified by faith on the other.

Theologians come to this passage to talk about one way of describing the gospel, the good news, the work of Jesus, and they refer to it as the gospel accomplished and the gospel applied.

[3 : 01] And it's all right here, the gospel accomplished. The Father put forward the Son as a propitiation. The gospel accomplished.

The gospel applied, verse 24, therefore all are justified by His grace as a gift. And so this is the place everybody comes to talk about the dizzying idea of justification by faith.

But that's not actually the center of the passage. The center of the passage, justification, it's so important, but how, and he says, verse 24, all are justified by His grace as a gift, how through the redemption, redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

In other words, the central idea of the passage, the main idea, the climax is found in a single word in the middle of the passage, verse 24, and it's the word redemption.

It's the word redemption. And let me just give you the summary logic of the text. This is what Paul is saying to us in a sentence. Redemption means God's free justification of unrighteous sinners because of a costly propitiation.

[4 : 25] Okay, it's incredibly abstract, these words. They're metaphors, they're ideas, and they're difficult to get at.

They really are when you read through this long sentence that Paul's writing here, but these abstract terms are realities, they're talking about realities, they're talking about truths.

This is not just abstract stuff, this is concrete, this is real, what he's describing here. And we'll see that these are the realities that every single human wants above all else and that Christians have tasted.

So redemption, let's explore it. What is it, why do we need it, how do we get it? So first, redemption, what is it?

Now the term Paul uses, redemption in verse 24, it can also be translated and sometimes is translated in the Bible as the word ransom.

[5 : 34] So it can either say the redemption we have in Jesus Christ or the ransoming that we have in Jesus Christ, and well what does it mean? And one of the ways we get at the meaning of a really important term like this, and there are multiple ways, new Testament scholars will go and they'll search for the way a word like that is used in the common language of the day, right?

To get a feel for Paul, I mean he was a Roman citizen, he grew up with a language that he received to get a feel for how people were using a term like this, redemption or ransom in the first century, the time that Paul lived.

I mean it's the same way that in a thousand years from now, little Johnny sitting in his school class will be reading some textbook and he'll raise his hand in class and he'll say to the teacher, but what is a bro hug?

But what does click bait mean, right? But what is binge watching? But what is a tweet, right?

Because they won't have those words anymore in a thousand years and how will you find out what that meant?

Well the teacher will say you've got to go read text from the 21st century because that's when bro hug, the term was invented and put in the Oxford English dictionary, the 21st century.

[6 : 59] And it's the same way with words sometimes from the Bible. There is a historian of the first century, his name was Josephus and he lived at the same time that Paul lived and he wrote a history of the Jews.

And he writes a story about 300 years before Jesus was born, 120,000 Jewish men and women were enslaved in Egypt again after the time of the Old Testament.

And there's this story that he tells of how this guy, Aristius, helped deliver them from captivity. And the way Aristius did it was kind of a Joseph sort of thing, he made friends with the king of Egypt.

And this is what Aristius says, Aristius came to the king of Egypt and said, oh king redeem or ransom the Jews from the miserable condition they are in.

And as Aristius said this to the king, the king looked at him with a cheerful and joyful countenance and said, how many tens of thousands of Jewish slaves, thus thou suppose there are that want to be ransomed?

[8 : 09] And Aristius replied, there's more than 10 times 10,000 and so they agreed there and then on a redemption price at 400 talents.

And so Leon Morris, he's a Romans commentator, he says this, the word redemption, the idea of redemption of ransom, it has its origin in the release of a prisoner from war on the payment of a price that we call a ransom price.

But in the first century it was extended to include the freeing of slaves by the payment of a ransom price. And this is the same idea that we get from the even more important context and that's the Old Testament because the Old Testament uses this word multiple times and there's one great example, Exodus 21, 29 to 30.

And there it's talking about a law here that a situation that we've all faced and that's this, whenever your ox is accustomed to gore people, to stick people that's horn too much, it says, the law says this, and the owner of the ox has been warned and has not put the ox in an appropriate fence to keep the ox from goreing people and the ox does go and the ox gore somebody and it kills that person, then what happens?

The ox shall be stoned and its owner shall also be put to death. Except if a redemption or a ransom is imposed on him, then he shall give the redemption price for his life, whatever it is that has been imposed.

[9 : 58] And that means that redemption, the word that Paul's using here, what it means is it means the release of a prisoner under the sentence of death.

It means freedom from death row is what redemption means. It means that the nature of redemption is finding ultimate freedom in the face of ultimate punishment, the ultimate, the end of

existence of death itself.

All right, so secondly, why does Paul say we need it? Why does Paul say that everybody needs redemption? And well, it's because of the verse that every person who grew up in the church memorized when they were in Sunday school, the verse that you see the Americans at their American football games holding up on posters, Romans 3-23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, the verse that is so common, even for people who aren't from church traditions, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Why do you need redemption? Why do you need freedom from death row? And it's simple, why does every human need to be freed from facing the sentence of death? And it's because we are facing the sentence of death.

It's simple, right? I mean, there's enough empirical evidence. This isn't controversial. We are facing the sentence of death. Every one of us knows that. We're facing the end of the track.

[11:30] It's out in front of us. The death is a reality. It's the great human problem. It's the problem of human existence. But when Paul says, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, he means more than just the body and soul being separated.

He means more than the end of biological life. He means more than that. Now, it's sin. He's defining it. He says it means this, to fall short of God's glory.

Now, we phrase that, we use all the time, but what does it mean? Really, to fall short of God's glory. To fall short, that can also be translated, literally, as to show up late, which means that some of you are in real trouble, okay?

Because to sin means to be late. To not be here on time. Well, it literally, it can be translated that way, but it means more. It doesn't just mean to be late for things.

Another way of saying it is it means to fail to attain, or to fail, my favorite way of thinking about it, is that it means to fail to hold something up, as if you're lifting.

[12:52] To fail to hold something up. And what is it that's something that you're failing to hold up, that you're falling short of, that you're not able to lift up? And it's God's glory. And the term glory, the Hebrew concept of glory, another way to say glory is weightiness.

You see, glory means weightiness. And that's why in our first, second Corinthians, 4:17, Paul uses this little phrase, the weight of glory, which really means the weight of weightiness.

The weight, it's an immense heaviness, a gravitas. What it's talking about here is the glory of God means the heaviness of God, the weightiness of God, his gravity, his gravitas, that in other words, that he's incredibly, absolutely majestic.

He's incredibly majestic. Now, this is still a little bit abstract. Let me make it more concrete by becoming more abstract for a moment. Yesterday, we had a conference here on God and anxiety, and one of the things we talked about was that humans, we are made in the image of God, Genesis chapter one, and part of what it means to be made in the image of God is to understand it, is to use a category that we've been talking about actually on Wednesday nights that theologians often use when they talk about the characteristics or the attributes of God.

They often will divide God's attributes into communicable and incommunicable attributes.

What's a communicable attributes? Well, it's like a communicable disease.

[14:33] Well, the complete opposite, but communicable, it means you can catch it. You can catch a communicable disease, and that you can catch a communicable attribute of God. It is the attributes of God that he shares with you, that you can catch.

God is absolute love, and because he shares his lovingness with us, we can love, and that's part of partaking in the communicable attributes of God.

That's what it means to be in the image of God. You image God when you reflect his communicable attributes, but there are also, there are also incommunicable attributes, attributes that you cannot share, that you can't touch, that make him absolute his absolute sovereignty, his simplicity, his independence, his necessity, the fact that he needs nothing, the fact that he never changes, and we are always changing, right?

You can't touch, you can share in God's, in what God is, his communicable attributes, but not in his incommunicable attributes. It's what defines the difference between us and him, but to be made in the image of God is to be like him, to share in his communicable attributes.

Now, in Genesis three, when the serpent came to Eve in the garden, Ligand Duncan, a pastor in the States, he regularly points this out.

[15 : 50] The serpent said to Eve, do you wanna be like God? And what should have Eve said to the serpent in the moment? I already am like God.

I can't be any more like God than I am right now. I'm sharing in God's communicable attributes, but she took and she ate the fruit. And what was she doing?

It was a power play. It was a will to power. What she was saying in that moment is, I don't just wanna be like God, I wanna be God. I want his incom communicable attributes for myself as well. I wanna be just like him. I wanna share in his absoluteness. And that means this, to fall short of God's weightiness, of God's glory.

It means not merely to fail God's standard, to fail God's glory. It means even more. It means that it means to fail human glory because human glory is that you are made in the image of God.

[16 : 48] You were given the glories of God, the communicable attributes. It's to be less than truly and fully human. To fall short of God's glory is not only to fail the standard, it's to fail the basic human standard, to be truly human, which is to be the image of God in the world, to show his communicable attributes, his love and his joy and his peace and his patience and his kindness.

God's glory is to also fail to be what we were made to be, to fail to be the image of God that God created us to be. And because of that, it's to miss the purpose of human existence.

It's to violate his justice, it's to make less of his weightiness. It's to go against the entire moral order. It incurs guilt and it deserves death.

Or another way that Paul expresses it here is like this. We failed God's glory and so we have lost the righteousness of God.

The righteousness of God, he mentions it twice in verse 21 to 24. The righteousness of God. Now, the righteousness of God, it's an incredibly important phrase in the book of Romans, it shows up eight times.

[18 : 05] Four of those times are right here, just in this passage. And when we think of the term righteousness, we often think more of an ethical virtue and a virtuousness.

But the Hebrew concept of righteousness is more basic than that. Righteousness, the righteousness of God in the Hebrew culture means a standing, it's a judicial term.

It means those who have the positive, secure verdict in the law court. Okay, so here's an example from Deuteronomy 25.

If there is a dispute between men, they go to court and the judge decides their case. And in deciding their case, the judge will do this.

He will either justify their righteousness, pronounce them innocent, in good standing, guilt free, or he will condemn the wicked. And so in other words, the one who is righteous, the one who has the righteousness of God is the one who can stand in the law court of God and for God to say, I approve you, I accept you, you are guilt free, you are innocent, come in, I want you, you are mine.

[19 : 21] It's the person who can stand in the face of God's law court. That's what it means to have the righteousness of God, to fall short of God's glory, means to fail God's standard, to not observe his weightiness, to not observe the basic human standard, which is to be the image of God, and it also means to lose the righteousness of God, which means that you cannot stand up in the law court of God.

You will not be found not guilty. You will be found guilty in God's law court. It's a judicial term, it's a judicial idea. And what it means, what Paul is saying, is that we need, we need unshackling redemption, we need to be freed from death row.

Okay, thirdly and finally, how do you get it? How do you get this redemption? And the answer is you don't, except for verse 21.

But now, but now a new age has come. That's what Paul is saying here. The righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law.

Okay, this means what it means to be approved by God, to stand up in God's law court, to stand in front of God, and here God say, I accept you, I find you worthy. It's apart from the law.

[20 : 46] It means it's apart from any attempt we can now make. It's apart from anything we can do to be accepted in God's law court. That means redemption is God's free justification of unrighteous sinners.

Redemption is God's free justification of unrighteous sinners. Now, we're gonna close our time today by just thinking about this incredibly dizzying term, justification. It's so central, but it can be really confusing to really get out.

What Paul's saying about this word justification that's been so central to Christianity and our tradition and what the Bible teaches. And one of the things, I know some people get so annoyed by the references to Greek from the pulpit sometimes, but this is one instance where it's really worth it, I promise, because what you can't see in English is that the word righteousness and the word justification are basically the same word.

They're almost spelled the exact same. And you can't see that in English. In English, it's an R and a J, but in Greek, it's two Ds. You can't see it. And it's so important to get the relationship between righteousness of God, which we said means to be able to stand up in God's courtroom and be said and found accepted, worthy.

And the same word that's being used basically, which is justification. Let's make it the same in English, the righteousness of God and righteous-ification.

[22 : 26] I invented that, I coined that, that's mine now. The righteousness of God and righteous-ification is another way of saying it, or the justice of God and justification to make it look the same in English.

What it means, what justification means, is that God looks at you in his law court and says, I accept you, I find you worthy.

I declare you to be righteous, even though you are not. Now, I said at the beginning that what we see with this idea is that every single human being wants this and only Christians have tasted it. And I think that every single human being wants justification before God. Everyone in all religions and also in the secular West wants more than anything else to be justified.

And you might say, how can you say that someone who doesn't believe in God or care about religion at all that lives as a secular person in the secular West possibly wanna be justified before God?

[23 : 45] I mean, how does that make sense in the least? And we can say it this way, every single human being, no matter what their background or their views are, wants to be found worthy and acceptable before the one that they think is truly precious.

Every single human being wants to be found worthy. You wanna be found acceptable. That's what the whole self-esteem movement was about. Every human wants to be found worthy and accepted. And I was reading Tim Keller this week and he reminded me of a great illustration of this from the classic, the Scottish classic, Chariots of Fire, the story of Eric Little and the story of Harold Abraham's that many of you are very familiar with.

They were Olympic athletes, they were runners. And Harold Abraham's, he was a teammate with Eric Little and somebody asked him once before he was about to run the 100 meter in the Olympics, why do you train so hard?

Why do you want this so badly? And he said, when the gun goes off, I have 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence. In other words, for Abraham's running, sitting out there in front of the crowd and crossing the finish line before, that was the only way in life, that was the precious, the one thing that he thought would make him worth it, would make people love him, would make him feel accepted, would, he called it justification to be accepted before the eye of the public.

[25 : 24] He didn't feel loved in any other place. He said, this is the only thing that will complete me, this is the only thing that will fill me up. You see, everybody wants justification. Everybody wants to be found worthy.

That's what they're looking for when they talk about self-esteem. And he wins and the crowd cheers and wouldn't you find out that it wasn't enough? And that's because that is nothing but a faint echo of the truth, of the real justification, of the real acceptance, of the real worthiness that everybody is seeking to have.

And that's to stand before your maker and be told, I want you, I accept you, you are worthy, I love you. We talked yesterday at the conference on God and Anxiety about Psalm 27.

And in Psalm 27, David is praying his fears. And when he prays his fears, he turns to God and he said, here's my only hope, that I may dwell in the presence of the Lord always, that I may see the beauty of your face.

And theologians call this idea that I may see the beauty of your face, the beatific vision, the blessed vision, the beautiful vision.

[26 : 46] David was expressing that that is the greatest desire of the human heart. It is the purpose of redemption and salvation. It is the end of all things, the point of Christianity.

It is the point of it all. It's to see the beauty of the face of God. That's what we were made to see. That's what was taken away from us in our falling short of the glory of God.

And at the heart of every attempt to find worth and something in this world, self-worth and to be accepted by whoever, making that our ultimate behind it stands the truth. And that's that we wanna see the face of God and we want the face of God to look at us and say, I accept you, you're worthy, I love you.

There's thousands of forms of self-justification out there. Other religions do it through moral conformity. They're saying you've got to be better if you wanna be accepted. The secular West chases self-worth through successes and relationships.

Christianity is different. It is unique. Paul puts it, there's only one way and he calls it the gift. The only way the guilty can truly pay their ransom price and be released from the shackles is by punishment of their through their own death.

[28 : 06] That's the only way except the gift, something unexpected. But now a new age has come, the age of, something, a substitute.

And we're gonna have to look at propitiation next week. We're gonna camp out here for a few weeks. But here's the basics. The gift is this, Jesus Christ was crushed so that we could be released from our shackles.

He took the place of the prisoner. He is God become man. He is the ransom price. He was delivered up. Here's redemption, it's propitiation and justification.

Here's putting it into plain words. He was made the unrighteousness of God. He took the guilty verdict. He took the penalty of death so that we could be declared righteous so that we could stand before the law court of God and God say to you, you're worthy.

I accept you, I love you. It's the thing that every single human being wants above all else. And it means forgiveness of sins.

[29 : 20] It means being released from the shackles. That's the forgiveness of sins. But it's not just a negative. That's being released from something. That's the negative side of it.

It comes with a positive idea. It's not just that you're forgiving your sins. That's just the beginning. Look, when the prodigal son comes home, it's not as if the father simply says, I'm not gonna punish you.

That's the forgiveness of sins. But it's more than that. He throws him a party. He puts his robe on his back. He brings out the best of the meats and the fine wines. It's more than just the forgiveness of sins.

Justification, it is the right. It is God saying to you, I give you the right to be called an heir of the kingdom. To be called son.

To be called daughter. To be lavished with all the gifts. It's more than, it's that God wants you.

That's justification. It's the greatest desire of the human heart.

[30 : 20] Okay, finally, closing. Paul says two times here, verse 22, verse 25. The only way you can know this, you can have it, it can be real for you, is by faith.

He says, he uses the word to believe. What does that mean? And in short, very briefly, I just wanna say, it means repentance and it means rest.

It means repentance and rest. And repentance and rest starts with giving up attempts at justifying our own worthiness before God and others.

It means giving up attempts at self-justification. It means giving up, seeking ultimate approval from the things that are not God. It means giving up moral conformity as a pathway.

It means giving up religion, fake, false religion, thinking that we'll be accepted by our church attendance. It means giving up your hopes to win the 100 meter dash in the Olympics and make that be the sum total of your worth.

[31 : 28] That's probably not gonna happen for any of us, but it may be that for you. It could be a relationship. It could be the hopes of finally getting a spouse.

That would make you worth it. And none of these things, these are all goods, but none of them would be it. None of them would be the satisfaction, the ultimate approval that you can only find in the redemption that is through faith in Jesus Christ.

It's giving it up, it's repenting of it, it's letting it go. We'll just close with this. And the chariot's a fire, back to chariot's a fire.

If you've seen the film, you know the story. There's a museum actually for it in Morningside, I think. Eric Liddle, he was a missionaries. He was an MK, a missionary kid in China, an incredible athlete. And the whole point of Chariot's Fire is to set up the great dichotomy between Eric Liddle and Harold Abraham's. Harold Abraham says, when the gun goes off, I have 10 seconds to justify my existence.

[32 : 35] This is the only place where I'll ever be worth it. And Eric Liddle, he says this. He says this, I believe God made me fast.

And when I run, I feel his pleasure. He loved running, but not that much. He loved God, he found justification by faith in Christ.

God was first for him, and he loved running. And he said, when I run, I think God takes pleasure in it. And he loved God so much that he was obedient.

He walked with God. You know the story, many of you. In 1924, at the Paris Olympics, he was favored athlete for the 100 meter dash. And when it came down for the 100 meter dash, they had scheduled it on a Sunday morning.

And he refused to run in it. He gave it up because it wasn't his idol. It wasn't the place that he found self worth. He didn't care, he would give up because he wasn't gonna miss worship. And he was favored at the Olympics for the 100 meter, for the gold.

[33 : 39] You have to come to Harold Abraham's and say, if this is your only hope, if this is your justification, what if you lose? He'd be crushed, you'd lose everything.

Repentance and rest, give it up, and turn to Jesus Christ in faith. And God will look at you and he will say, you were worth it. I accept you, I pronounce you clean, even if you aren't, because of a substitute.

Believe and rest in the work of another. That's an invitation, let's pray. Father, we give thanks for justification by faith, for redemption, for the price that has been paid in Christ.

We thank you in Jesus' name, amen.